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Perceived Age, Gender, and Racial/Ethnic Discrimination in Europe: Results from the European Social Survey

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The present study evaluated the relationship between individual characteristics (ascribed, achieved, and psychosocial) and country characteristics (e.g., discrimination at the country level) and perceived discrimination. Analysis was based on the fourth round of the European Social Survey, which encompasses 54,988 respondents from 28 countries. Hierarchical linear modeling was conducted. In most countries, there was a general trend towards a higher prevalence rate of perceived age discrimination (mean prevalence rate across countries = 34.5%; $SE = .002$), followed by gender (mean prevalence rate across countries = 24.9%; $SE = .002$), and ethnic discrimination (mean prevalence rate across countries = 17.3%; $SE = .002$). Variations in perceived discrimination were largely attributed to individual differences. The findings are discussed in light of a distinction between perceived and actual discrimination.

Perceived discrimination is broadly defined as the perception of being treated unfairly by others because of personal attributes such as one's age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, physical appearance, and other characteristics (Kessler, Mickelson, & Williams, 1999). In contrast to actual acts of discrimination, which can be objectively identified, perceived discrimination has to be noted by the individual and interpreted as such. This calls for the subjective nature of perceived discrimination (Meyer, 2003). Nonetheless, even though the subjective nature of perceived discrimination is acknowledged, there is ample research to support its negative effects (Kessler et al., 1999).

Past research has primarily focused on discrimination based on age, gender, and ethnicity, broadly identified as the three "isms," ageism, sexism, and racism (Banaji & Hardin, 1996). Consistently, age, gender, and ethnicity are among the most common characteristics associated with the report of discrimination across samples of different age groups and ethnic origins. Researchers show that both young and old individuals, women, and ethnic minorities are more likely to report discrimination than their counterparts (Ayalon & Gum, 2011; Kessler et al., 1999).

Consistently, ageism, racism, and sexism are the three most common isms reported and studied to date (Ayalon & Gum, 2011; Nelson, 2005). The objectives of the present study are as follows: (a) to describe the prevalence of perceived discrimination based on age, sex, and race in Europe; (b) to identify individual-level correlates associated with perceived discrimination; and

(c) to identify the role of country-level indicators of discrimination in one's reports of perceived discrimination.

AGEISM, SEXISM, AND RACISM IN SOCIETY

Given the fact that Europe is the continent with the largest proportion of older adults (European Population Committee of the Council of Europe, 2006), the study of perceived ageism in Europe is of particular interest. There is strong evidence to the presence of ageism directed mainly towards older adults in society. In a comprehensive meta-analysis of 232 effect sizes, researchers found that across five categories, including evaluation (e.g., generous, friendly); competence (e.g., intelligent, good memory); attractiveness (pretty, wrinkled); behavior/behavior intention (e.g., willingness to interact with, make phone call); and age stereotypes (e.g., old fashioned, talks about past); older adults were rated more negatively when compared to younger adults (Kite, Stockdale, Whitley, & Johnson, 2005).

Evidence to the prevalence and pervasiveness of ageism has been obtained both in laboratory/experimental studies (Perdue & Gurtman, 1990) and in real life (Clarke & Griffin, 2008; Palmore, 2001). The pervasiveness of ageism has been documented in multiple studies. For instance, researchers have shown that children as young as eight years old already hold stereotypic perceptions about age and physical attractiveness (Korthase & Trenholme, 1983). Consistently, there is strong evidence for discrimination towards older adults in almost all spheres of life including health, mental health (Robb, Chen, & Haley, 2002), and the work place (MacGregor, 2006).

Ageism in Europe has been identified in various settings including the healthcare system (Peake, Thompson, Lowe, Pearson, & Participating Centres, 2003; Wing, 1993); advertisement (Ann, 1999; Carrigan & Szmigin, 2000); and the workplace (Jyrkinen & McKie, 2012). Moreover, in a comparison of Germany to the United States, researchers have argued for a more negative view of aging in Germany (McConatha, Schnell, Volkwein, Riley, & Leach, 2003).

The study of sexism in Europe is important given ongoing efforts to promote gender equality or mainstreaming across Europe (Scambor & Scambor, 2008). Similar to ageism, the high prevalence of sexism is well documented. In multiple studies spanning over several decades, researchers have shown an income gap between men and women of similar qualifications as well as differential patterns of employment and career opportunity (Helps & Skitmore, 1975; Zorn, Snyder, & Satterblom, 2009). In general, researchers have found that gender equality is more likely to be advocated in those European countries that enjoy better financial status (Olson et al., 2007). Nonetheless, a North–South divide (Bygnes, 2012; Haavind & Magnusson, 2005) and an East–West divide (Coyle, 2007; Lobodzinska, 1996; Saxonberg & Sirovátka, 2006) in terms of women's rights have been noted, suggesting cross-national variations in gender-based discrimination in Europe. Others have studied gender (in)equality in Europe in relation to the three welfare states, identifying both similarities and dissimilarities across the three regimes. They argue that although the dual earner family is becoming more common in all three welfare regimes, gender equality is much higher under the Scandinavian welfare system (Abrahamson & Wehner, 2006).

Finally, ethnic discrimination or racism has been the most widely studied ism (Nelson, 2005; North & Fiske, 2012). Interest in ethnic discrimination in Europe has largely been attributed to

Europe's history with regard to ethnic minorities, emergent trends of migration and immigration over the past few decades, and acts of discrimination directed at immigrants (Stephan, 2008; Zick, Pettigrew, & Wagner, 2008). The negative effects of discrimination on ethnic minorities' educational achievements, occupational opportunities, and income have been widely noted (Williams & Collins, 1995). Moreover, there is a wide body of literature attesting to the negative consequences of racism in the health care system, with both individual and institutional discrimination being identified as adversely affecting the health status of ethnic minorities (Williams, 1999).

Researchers have argued that racism in Europe is manifested in multiple forms, ranging from immigration legislation to institutional discrimination and sporadic acts of violence toward individuals (Baimbridge, Burkitt, & Macey, 1994). East–West (Bergmann, 2008; Ceobanu & Escandell, 2008; Kunovich, 2004) and North (Aalberg, Iyengar, & Messing, 2011; Knudsen, 1997)–South (Solé, 2004) differences in attitudes towards ethnic minorities and immigrants have been examined over the years under the assumption that cross-national differences exist. Nonetheless, shifts in attitudes have been noted, with some countries, traditionally known as being highly liberal, demonstrating racist views towards new immigrants and refugees in more recent years (Wren, 2001).

PREDICTORS OF PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION

A variety of factors have been proposed as potential correlates of perceived discrimination, given its subjective nature. In laboratory studies, external factors associated with the event, such as its level of ambiguity, or the characteristics of the person performing the discriminatory act have shown to be related to perceived discrimination. In naturalistic studies, on the other hand, the focus has been on ascribed (e.g., age, gender, education); achieved (e.g., education, income); or psychosocial (e.g., depression, self-esteem) characteristics of the individual as potential predictors of perceived discrimination.

Ascribed Characteristics and Perceived Discrimination

Age, gender, and ethnicity have been associated with perceived ageism, sexism, and racism, respectively. In general, research has shown that younger individuals are more likely to perceive discrimination than older ones. For instance, in a large epidemiological study, researchers have shown that younger adults are more likely to report perceived discrimination than older adults (Kessler et al., 1999). Similar trends have been documented in the workplace (Chou & Choi, 2011); whereas others reported that both young and old individuals are likely to perceive ageism in employment settings (Snape & Redman, 2003). In a longitudinal analysis of perceived age discrimination among a national representative sample of working women, the authors found a curvilinear relationship between age and perceived discrimination. Their analysis suggested that perceived discrimination has two peaks: early adulthood and middle age. They further concluded that the primary determinant of perceived discrimination is age, rather than cohort or historical period (Gee, Pavalko, & Long, 2007a). Only a handful of studies have examined cross-national differences in ageism in Europe, arguing for large cross-country variations in the experience of age-based discrimination (van den Heuvel & van Santvoort, 2011).

Results have been more consistent with regard to women and ethnic minorities, who are known to report higher levels of perceived discrimination when compared with men or individuals of the ethnic majority group, respectively (Barnes et al., 2004; Carr et al., 2000; Kessler et al., 1999).

There is also a growing interest in the associations of these ascribed characteristics (age, gender, and ethnicity) with perceived discrimination that is not directly attributed to the particular characteristic possessed by the individual (e.g., the relationship between age and sexism or gender and racism). For instance, researchers have long noted an interaction between sexism and ageism, where women are likely to be perceived as aging earlier and are more likely to actively conceal age-related signs in an attempt to remain socially visible in a society that values youth among women (Barrett, 2005; Barrett & von Rohr, 2008; Bart, 1969; Biggs, 2004; Clarke & Griffin, 2008). In contrast, there is some literature to suggest that ethnic minority elderly are less likely to experience ageism, as old age is valued more favorably in some ethnic minority groups (Fiske, Bergsieker, Russell, & Williams, 2009). Yet others have argued for a double jeopardy of ageism and racism (Kasschau, 1977). Finally, several studies that have examined the interaction between sexism and racism have suggested that women of color experience the most discrimination (Berdahl & Moore, 2006; Sanchez-Hucles, 1997; Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2008), whereas others have argued that men of color are more likely to experience discrimination when compared to women (Arai, Bursell, & Nekby, 2008; Williams, 2003).

Achieved Characteristics and Perceived Discrimination

Socioeconomic status measured by education or income has been examined in relation to perceived discrimination. Researchers have shown that financial difficulty has an independent effect on perceived gender and ethnic discrimination (Ro & Choi, 2009), whereas others have found an inconsistent support for the role of achieved characteristics in perceived discrimination (Kessler et al., 1999). In support of a relationship between education and perceived ethnic discrimination, researchers have shown that being racially conscious or learning about feminism and gender-conformity pressures are associated with higher levels of perceived ethnic and sex based discrimination among women and ethnic minorities, respectively (Gary, 1995; Leaper & Brown, 2008).

Psychological Characteristics and Perceived Discrimination

Psychological variables have also shown to be associated with perceived discrimination. For instance, stigma consciousness has been identified as a correlate of perceived discrimination, suggesting that individuals who expect to be stereotyped by others are more likely to perceive events as discriminatory (Pinel, 1999). Others have shown that higher levels of depression or anxiety and intergroup competence are associated with higher levels of perceived discrimination. This has been attributed to a general negative frame of mind that colors one's views of the experience of discrimination (Phinney, Madden, & Santos, 1998).

THE PRESENT STUDY

Although evidence for the presence of discrimination in Europe as well as elsewhere around the world is unequivocal, actual acts of discrimination and perceived discrimination are not

synonymous. When one has to judge an event as a personal act of discrimination, this is often done under conditions of uncertainty and ambivalence, especially because aggregated data about discrimination against the entire group is unavailable to the individual respondent (Crosby, 1984). In addition, in order to acknowledge personal discrimination, one has to infer intentions behind the act. These intentions might be unclear from the perspective of the perceiver (Phinney et al., 1998). This implies that perceived discrimination is influenced by one's interpretations (Phinney et al., 1998) and is not necessarily synonymous with discriminatory attitudes or acts. The distinction between individual- and country-level predictors of perceived discrimination allows identifying what individual-level characteristics are associated with perceived discrimination; even once country-level indicators (which supposedly represent more contextual objective aggregated indicators of discrimination) are taken into account. Because research has demonstrated a correlation between perceived discrimination and discriminatory acts (Frieze, Olson, & Good, 1990; Gee, 2002) as well as an association between perceived discrimination and wellbeing (Ayalon & Gum, 2011; Kessler et al., 1999); health (Gee, Spencer, Chen, & Takeuchi, 2007b; Lewis et al., 2009); and even mortality (Barnes et al., 2008); there is merit in the study of perceived discrimination.

The present study reports the prevalence of perceived age, gender, and ethnic discrimination in Europe. The study evaluates the association of individual-level characteristics (e.g., age, gender, education) as well as country-level characteristics with the age, gender, and ethnic discrimination in Europe. As such, it provides a unique opportunity to compare the three types of discrimination and to identify how much of the subjective experience of perceived discrimination can be attributed to country-level or contextual indicators of discrimination, which supposedly represent more objective aggregated data concerning discrimination.

The present study is unique for several reasons. First, although the associations of perceived discrimination with individual-level characteristics have been examined in past research (Ayalon & Gum, 2011; Kessler et al., 1999), they have yet to be examined in a broad cross-national context. The cross-national nature of the present study, which is based on the European Social Survey (ESS), a biennial multi-country, cross-sectional survey covering over 30 nations (<http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>), allows for the evaluation of the role of cross-national differences in perceived discrimination. The focus on perceived discrimination attributed to three different ascribed characteristics (e.g., age, gender, and ethnicity) is another innovation, as the majority of research to date, has primarily focused on discrimination attributed to ethnicity or race (Nelson, 2005; North & Fiske, 2012). This allows for a better differentiation between the various types of perceived discrimination, which are thought to have different origins and prevalence (Hopkins, 1980). The inclusion of individuals of a wide age-range is yet another advantage as it allows examining perceived ageism not only through the eyes of older adults, but also from the perspective of younger adults, a group that has been almost neglected by past research concerning ageism (North & Fiske, 2012). Moreover, in contrast to the majority of past research that evaluated contextual variables associated with the presence of actual acts of discrimination (Bergmann, 2008; Biggs & Knauss, 2011; Blalock, 1957; Zick et al., 2008), this study evaluates the context in which discrimination is most likely to be perceived.

Based on past research, the following hypotheses are postulated:

Hypothesis I: Perceived age-based discrimination is more prevalent than sex- or ethnic-based discrimination.

- Hypothesis II: Older adults, women, and ethnic minorities are more likely to report age, gender, and ethnic discrimination than younger adults, men, and individuals of the majority group, respectively. In addition, individuals who report lower levels of life satisfaction (e.g., an indicator of psychological wellbeing) are more likely to report higher levels of perceived discrimination.
- Hypothesis III: In countries that experience lower levels of discrimination, individuals tend to report lower levels of perceived discrimination.

METHODS

Analysis was based on the fourth round of the European Social Survey (ESS; <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>). The ESS is funded jointly by the European Commission, the European Science Foundation, and academic funding bodies in each participating country. The ESS is led by a center coordinating team, a multi-national scientific advisory board, small, multi-national methods groups, and a sampling panel. One of the main advantages of the ESS concerns the vigorous attempts to ensure equality or equivalence in sampling and translation of questionnaires in order to allow for cross-national comparisons. Target population is defined as all persons aged 15 years or older residents in private households within the borders of the nation, regardless of nationality, citizenship, language, or legal status (Hader & Lynn, 2007). Each national sample should achieve a simple random sample of at least 1,500 respondents and a target response rate of 70% or greater for all countries. All interviews are conducted face to face. The ESS is composed of a core questionnaire and two rotating questionnaires. The core questionnaire is administered every round and concerns a variety of variables including media use; human values; demographics; and socio-economics. One of the rotating modules of the fourth round, administered in 2008, focused on ageism (Abrams & Lima, 2007). This module forms the basis of the present study.

Outcome Variables

As part of the ageism module, three consecutive questions concerning perceived discrimination were asked in order to evaluate the experience of perceived ageism, sexism, and racism. Specifically, respondents were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale how often they have experienced prejudice or have been treated unfairly because of their age, gender, or race or ethnic background. Response options ranged from 0 = *never* to 4 = *very often*, with a higher score representing greater perceived discrimination. Because these variables were positively skewed, with most respondents reporting no exposure to discrimination, they were dichotomized in the present analysis to represent whether or not perceived discrimination based on age, gender, or ethnicity was reported. This practice is consistent with past research concerning perceived discrimination (Ayalon & Gum, 2011).

Individual-Level Variables

Age (<30, 30–60, >60), gender, and ethnic minority status (minority vs. not), number of years of education, subjective income (1–4), and satisfaction with life (0–10) were gathered by self-report.

Country-Level Variables

Three aggregated indicators of discrimination at the country level were obtained. The gender gap index is a way to capture gender-based disparities on economic, educational, political, and health based criteria. It is produced as a ratio of women over men, with a higher score indicating greater equality. Age-based discrimination was evaluated using an item from the ESS in an aggregated form: “Do you see people in their 20s and those in their 70s as *two separate groups* (1) or as *single group/individuals* (0)?” This follows the rationale that individuals who see the two age groups as belonging to a single group or as individuals are being less ageist than those who perceive the two groups as separate. Ethnic discrimination was evaluated using an item from the ESS in an aggregated form: “To what extent do you think your country should allow people of a different race or ethnic group as most people to come and live in the country?” (1 = *allow many to come and live here*; 4 = *allow none*).

Analysis

I first conducted univariate and bivariate analyses to obtain descriptive statistics. This analysis was conducted using SPSS 17.0. Design weights were employed in order to adjust for the complex sampling procedure. Next, I conducted multilevel analysis, with respondent-level data representing the first level of predictors (e.g., age, gender, ethnic minority status) and country-level data (e.g., gender gap index) representing the second level. The outcome variables were perceived discrimination based on age, gender, and ethnicity. HLM6.08 was used for multilevel data analysis.

Multilevel analysis was conducted to account for the hierarchical nature of the data, where one unit of analysis (respondent) is nested within another unit of analysis (country). This analysis tests the assumption that individual observations are clustered within a higher-level unit and share a common context, thus, they may be more similar than observations from individuals in different higher-level units. In the first step of the multilevel analysis, an empty (unconditional) model with country as a random effect was conducted. The assumption is that we have sampled from a population of countries as we usually sample from a population of individuals. This model estimates the outcome per country rather than per respondent. The intraclass correlation (ICC) scores that result could range from 0% to 100%, and they reflect the degree to which respondents from the same country are more similar to one another than respondents from other countries. Thus, the ICC indicates the proportion of the total variance that is due to differences between countries and can be attributed to contextual-level variables. As a rule of thumb, ICCs of .05, .10, and .15 represent small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively (Hox, 2002).

The next model includes effects of individual-level predictors to evaluate the association of ascribed, achieved and psychosocial characteristics with the three types of perceived discrimination. A subsequent model includes effects of country-level predictors to evaluate the relationship between aggregated discrimination at the country level with one’s subjective perception of discrimination. Finally, both individual- and country-level variables are included in the model.

RESULTS

The source sample consisted of 28 countries and a total of 54,988 respondents. Table 1 outlines the demographics of the sample by country. Sample size of participating countries ranged from

TABLE 1
Sample Characteristics

	Age	Female	Minority status	Years of education	Satisfaction with life (0–10)	Subjective income (1–4)
Belgium (1,760)	46.5(.45)	896(50.9%)	71(4.1%)	12.66(3.66)	7.27(1.90)	1.90(.84)
Bulgaria (2,230)	49.3(.40)	1,252(56.2%)	401(20.2%)	11.03(3.53)	4.41(2.60)	2.99(.82)
Switzerland (1,819)	46.4(.47)	997(53.5%)	141(9.0%)	11.32(3.49)	7.96(1.71)	1.60(.73)
Cyprus (1,215)	44.7(.56)	602(48.6%)	40(3.1%)	11.74(4.00)	7.08(1.80)	2.10(.84)
Czech Republic (2,018)	44.7(.42)	1,034(51.3%)	47(2.8%)	12.57(2.42)	6.65(2.10)	2.23(.76)
Germany (2,751)	48.7(.36)	1,301(46.6%)	118(4.7%)	13.66(3.46)	6.95(2.22)	1.87(.74)
Denmark (1,610)	49.3(.45)	811(50.4%)	49(3.0%)	12.64(4.70)	8.52(1.42)	1.36(.59)
Estonia (1,661)	47.8(.47)	957(57.6%)	323(21.2%)	12.44(3.55)	6.20(2.23)	2.25(.71)
Spain (2,576)	46.3(.41)	1,354(51.8%)	77(3.2%)	10.99(5.01)	7.30(1.80)	1.99(.79)
Finland (2,195)	48.0(.40)	1,118(50.9%)	33(1.5%)	12.85(4.14)	7.94(1.54)	1.91(.66)
France (2,073)	46.1(.44)	1,132(54.0%)	79(4.0%)	12.67(3.96)	6.35(2.42)	1.80(.71)
United Kingdom (2,342)	46.4(.42)	1,270(52.4%)	162(7.9%)	13.60(3.72)	7.08(2.09)	1.85(.81)
Greece (2,072)	42.9(.38)	1,131(53.9%)	87(4.6%)	11.48(3.70)	6.06(2.31)	2.58(.89)
Croatia (1,473)	43.7(.47)	838(57.0%)	103(5.7%)	11.95(3.67)	6.67(2.26)	2.08(.86)
Hungary (1,544)	47.5(.52)	842(53.7%)	80(5.4%)	12.04(3.77)	5.29(2.59)	2.59(.78)
Israel (2,490)	43.5(.43)	1,350(54.3%)	371(14.1%)	12.99(3.22)	7.44(2.17)	2.20(.90)
Latvia (1,980)	48.3(.45)	1,233(62.1%)	152(7.9%)	12.28(3.36)	5.88(2.40)	2.74(.83)
Netherlands (1,778)	47.1(.45)	960(51.3%)	122(6.7%)	13.37(4.23)	7.69(1.45)	1.60(.71)
Norway (1,549)	45.8(.45)	742(47.9%)	61(3.9%)	13.43(3.83)	7.89(1.66)	1.46(.65)
Poland (1,619)	44.6(.58)	855(52.8%)	25(1.6%)	11.97(3.62)	6.87(2.30)	2.22(.66)
Portugal (2,367)	50.2(.46)	1,441(59.2%)	58(2.5%)	7.72(4.77)	5.72(2.27)	2.52(.79)
Romania (2,146)	43.0(.39)	1,180(55.6%)	338(18.1%)	11.46(3.61)	6.14(2.50)	2.61(.94)
Russia (2,512)	44.4(.42)	1,523(57.6%)	347(17.4%)	12.40(3.05)	5.47(2.49)	2.73(.81)
Sweden (1,830)	47.6(.45)	912(49.8%)	57(3.1%)	12.72(3.65)	7.86(1.72)	1.50(.69)
Slovenia (1,286)	46.6(.52)	690(53.7%)	28(2.2%)	11.65(3.69)	6.93(2.14)	1.76(.76)
Slovakia (1,801)	47.8(.59)	1,116(59.2%)	98(5.5%)	13.24(3.23)	6.51(2.22)	2.26(.77)
Turkey (2,416)	38.5(.58)	1,289(50.2%)	142(11.3%)	6.35(4.15)	5.68(3.04)	2.63(.84)
Ukraine (1,845)	45.9(.55)	1,155(62.1%)	104(7.3%)	12.25(3.48)	4.19(2.56)	3.00(.75)

Note. Results are reported as mean (standard error) for continuous variables and frequency (%) for categorical variables.

as low as 1,215 in Cyprus to as high as 2,751 in Germany. Mean age of respondents ranged from as low as 38.5 ($SE = .58$) in Turkey to as high as 50.2 ($SE = .46$) in Portugal. Similarly, there was a wide variability in the percentage of individuals who self-identified as belonging to an ethnic minority group, ranging from 1.6% in Poland to 21.2% in Estonia.

The Prevalence of Perceived Age, Gender, and Ethnic Discrimination in Europe

Table 2 outlines the distributions of perceived age, gender, and ethnic discrimination by country. The lowest prevalence of perceived discrimination was reported in Cyprus and the highest in the Czech Republic. In most countries, there was a general trend towards a higher prevalence of perceived age discrimination (mean prevalence across countries = 34.5%; $SE = .002$), followed by

TABLE 2
Frequencies and Percentages of Perceived Age, Gender, and Ethnic Discrimination by Country

	<i>Perceived age discrimination</i>	<i>Perceived gender discrimination</i>	<i>Perceived ethnic discrimination</i>
Belgium	774(44.1%)	547(31.2%)	296(16.8%)
Bulgaria	636(28.0%)	380(17.3%)	366(16.4%)
Switzerland	506(27.8%)	387(21.1%)	222(12.2%)
Cyprus	227(17.1%)	165(12.8%)	126(9.5%)
Czech Republic	1,079(53.9%)	853(43.4%)	538(27.2%)
Germany	917(32.8%)	513(18.9%)	269(10.4%)
Denmark	478(29.9%)	325(20.4%)	109(6.8%)
Estonia	617(37.6%)	406(24.8%)	356(21.6%)
Spain	750(31.4%)	667(28.2%)	576(24.3%)
Finland	1,017(46.5%)	697(31.9%)	172(7.9%)
France	714(35.0%)	552(26.9%)	346(16.7%)
United Kingdom	656(29.7%)	561(25.0%)	357(16.5%)
Greece	519(24.1%)	422(20.6%)	330(16.4%)
Croatia	368(26.4%)	284(20.5%)	182(12.2%)
Hungary	397(24.2%)	207(12.4%)	134(9.0%)
Israel	816(31.7%)	669(25.3%)	849(31.7%)
Latvia	616(30.3%)	377(18.5%)	411(20.4%)
Netherlands	811(47.1%)	619(36.2%)	295(17.2%)
Norway	441(28.5%)	318(20.6%)	126(8.2%)
Poland	458(28.1%)	254(15.7%)	92(5.9%)
Portugal	441(17.1%)	318(12.5%)	254(10.6%)
Romania	831(40.9%)	631(32.7%)	500(25.6%)
Russia	1,106(43.9%)	744(30.1%)	545(23.1%)
Sweden	635(35.0%)	490(27.0%)	172(9.5%)
Slovenia	444(35.0%)	277(21.9%)	156(12.3%)
Slovakia	729(42.0%)	473(28.0%)	293(17.4%)
Turkey	637(21.8%)	581(20.9%)	507(19.6%)
Ukraine	638(37.1%)	368(22.7%)	252(15.4%)

gender (mean prevalence across countries = 24.9%; $SE = .002$), and ethnic discrimination (mean prevalence across countries = 17.3%; $SE = .002$). This trend was not maintained in Israel and Latvia.

Individual- and Country-Level Predictors of Perceived Discrimination

The unconditional models yielded ICCs of 4.2% for perceived age discrimination, 3.9% for perceived sex discrimination, and 7.3% for perceived ethnic discrimination. The low (for gender and age discrimination) to medium (for ethnic discrimination) ICCs in all three analyses indicate that most of the variance in perceived discrimination is attributed to individual-level variables. Nonetheless, the significant random effects of the intercept in all three models suggest significant variations in perceived age, gender, and ethnic discrimination by country (Tables 3, 4, and 5).

Table 3 outlines the results of multilevel analyses aimed to identify individual- and country-level predictors of perceived age discrimination. In the second model aimed to examine

TABLE 3
Individual- and Country-Level Predictors of Perceived Age Discrimination

	Model 1 – Unconditional	Model 2 – Individual level	Model 3 – Country level	Model 4 – Country and individual level
	Fixed effects OR 95% CI	Fixed effects OR 95% CI	Fixed effects OR 95% CI	Fixed effects OR 95% CI
	Random variance	Random variance	Random variance	Random variance
Intercept	.50***(.43–.58)	.54***(.47–.63)	.50***(.43–.58)	.54***(.48–.63)
Individual level				
Age (<30 vs. 30–60)		.72***(.68–.76)		.72***(.69–.76)
Age (<30 vs. >60)		.83*(.72–.95)		.83***(.72–.95)
Gender (men ref.)		1.01(.96–1.05)		1.01(.96–1.05)
Ethnicity (non-minority ref.)		1.02(.93–1.13)		1.02(.93–1.12)
Education		1.01***(1.01–1.02)	.0002**	1.01***(1.00–1.02)
Subjective income (1–4)		1.12***(1.07–1.18)	.02***	1.12***(1.07–1.17)
Life satisfaction (0–10)		.90***(.89–.92)	.002***	.90***(.89–.91)
Age (<30 vs. 30–60)*ethnicity		.99(.92–1.08)	.02	1.01(.93–1.15)
Age (<30 vs. >60)*ethnicity		1.24***(1.09–1.42)	.11	1.22***(1.06–1.40)
Country level				
Gender gap index			2.00(.74–54.13)	6.65(.71–61.97)
Gini coefficient			.99(.95–1.02)	.97*(.95–.99)

Note. Higher score on the gender gap index represents greater equality; higher score on age-based discrimination represents greater discrimination; higher score on ethnic discrimination represents greater discrimination. OR = odds ratio; 95% CI = 95% confidence interval; 0 indicates no discrimination, 1 indicates perceived discrimination.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

TABLE 4
Individual- and Country-Level Predictors of Perceived Sexism

	Model 1 – Unconditional		Model 2 – Individual level		Model 3 – Country level		Model 4 – Country and individual level	
	Fixed effects OR 95% CI	Random variance	Fixed effects OR 95% CI	Random variance	Fixed effects OR 95% CI	Random variance	Fixed effects OR 95% CI	Random variance
Intercept	.31*** (.27–.36)	.14***	.23*** (.20–.26)	.17***	.31*** (.27–.36)	.16***	.23*** (.21–.27)	.19***
Individual level								
Age (<30 vs. 30–60)			.92* (.88–.97)	.01**			.93* (.89–.97)	.02**
Age (<30 vs. >60)			.87*** (.82–.93)	.05***			.89** (.83–.94)	.05***
Gender (men ref.)			1.76*** (1.65–1.88)	.03***			1.74*** (1.64–1.86)	.03***
Ethnicity (non-minority ref.)			1.19* (1.08–1.32)	.07*			1.18** (1.07–1.29)	.07*
Education			1.03*** (1.02–1.04)	.0003**			1.02*** (1.03–1.04)	.0003**
Subjective income (1–4)			1.05* (1.01–1.10)	.01***			1.05* (1.01–1.10)	.01***
Life satisfaction (0–10)			.92*** (.90–.94)	.002***			.92*** (.91–.94)	.002***
Age (<30 vs. 30–60)*ethnicity			.92** (.86–.98)	.004			.92* (.86–.98)	.004
Age (<30 vs. >60)*ethnicity			1.06(.93–1.20)	.10			1.04(.92–1.17)	.10
Age (<30 vs. 30–60)*gender			1.04(.99–1.10)	.01			1.03(.98–1.09)	.01
Age (<30 vs. >60)*gender			.75*** (.69–.81)	.03*			.75*** (.69–.81)	.03*
Country level								
Gender gap index					1.35(.05–39.46)		4.13(.39–43.86)	
Gini coefficient					.99(.96–1.03)		.99(.97–1.01)	

Note. Higher score on the gender gap index represents greater equality; higher score on age-based discrimination represents greater discrimination; higher score on ethnic discrimination represents greater discrimination. OR = odds ratio; 95% CI = 95% confidence interval; 0 indicates no discrimination, 1 indicates perceived discrimination.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

TABLE 5
Individual- and Country-Level Predictors of Perceived Racism

	Model 1 – Unconditional		Model 2 – Individual level		Model 3 – Country level		Model 4 – Country and individual level	
	Fixed effects OR 95% CI	Random variance	Fixed effects OR 95% CI	Random variance	Fixed effects OR 95% CI	Random variance	Fixed effects OR 95% CI	Random variance
Intercept	.19***(.15–.23)	.27***	.19***(.17–.22)	.30***	.18***(.15–.22)	.24***	.19***(.17–.21)	.28***
Individual level								
Age (<30 vs. 30–60)			.97*(.95–1.00)	.004			.97*(.94–.99)	.005
Age (<30 vs. >60)			.93*(.88–.97)	.05***			.92*(.88–.96)	.05***
Gender (men ref.)			.96(.92–1.00)	.02*			.96*(.92–.99)	.02*
Ethnicity (non-minority ref.)			3.72*** (3.02–4.60)	.41***			3.79*** (3.06–4.70)	.40***
Education			1.01 (1.00–1.01)	.0006***			1.01*(1.00–1.01)	.0006***
Subjective income (1–4)			1.12*** (1.08–1.17)	.02***			1.13*** (1.09–1.17)	.02***
Life satisfaction (0–10)			.94*** (.93–.96)	.003***			.94*** (.93–.96)	.003***
Age (<30 vs. 30–60)*ethnicity			1.03(.92–1.15)	.04			1.03(.92–1.14)	.05
Age (<30 vs. >60)*ethnicity			.73*** (.63–.85)	.06			.74*** (.64–.86)	.06
Country level								
Gender gap index					.02*(.001–.43)		.14***(.02–.90)	
Gini coefficient					1.03(.99–1.06)		.99(.98–1.01)	

Note. Higher score on the gender gap index represents greater equality; higher score on age-based discrimination represents greater discrimination; higher score on ethnic discrimination represents greater discrimination. OR = odds ratio; 95% CI = 95% confidence interval; 0 indicates no discrimination, 1 indicates perceived discrimination.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

individual-level correlates, younger age, higher levels of education, higher subjective income, and lower life satisfaction were associated with greater odds of perceived ageism. The random slope models suggest that the associations of age, gender, education, subjective income, and life satisfaction with perceived age discrimination differ significantly cross nationally. In the third model, country-level variables were entered. None of these variables were significantly associated with perceived ageism. Finally, both individual- and country-level variables were entered into the model. Younger age, higher levels of education, higher subjective income, and lower life satisfaction were associated with higher odds of perceived ageism. Age-based discrimination at the country level was also a significant predictor, so that in countries in which respondents were more likely to perceive individuals in their 20s and those over 70 as representing two different groups, respondents also had greater odds of reporting perceived age-based discrimination.

Table 4 outlines the results of multilevel analyses aimed to identify individual- and country-level predictors of perceived gender discrimination. In the second model, younger adults, females, individuals of ethnic minority status, individuals of higher levels of education, individuals of higher subjective income, and individuals of lower life satisfaction were more likely to report perceived gender discrimination. The significant random slope models suggest that the associations of all of these variables with perceived gender discrimination vary significantly cross nationally. Next, country-level variables were entered into the model. None of these variables were significantly associated with perceived gender discrimination. Finally, both individual- and country-level variables were entered into the model and potential interactions were examined. Younger adults, females, individuals of ethnic minority status, individuals of higher levels of education, individuals of higher subjective income, and individuals of lower life satisfaction were more likely to report gender discrimination. In addition, in countries of higher gender-gap index (greater gender equality), respondents had greater odds of reporting perceived gender discrimination.

Table 5 outlines the results of multilevel analyses aimed at identifying individual- and country-level predictors of perceived ethnic discrimination. When individual-level variables were entered into the model, younger adults, ethnic minorities, individuals of higher subjective income and of lower life satisfaction had greater odds of reporting perceived ethnic discrimination. The significant random slope models suggest that the associations of all individual-level variables with perceived ethnic discrimination varies across nations. Next, country-level variables were entered into the model. In countries of lower gender gap index, respondents were more likely to report ethnic discrimination. Finally, both individual- and country-level variables were entered into the model. Younger adults, men, ethnic minorities, individuals of higher subjective income and of lower life satisfaction were significantly more likely to report ethnic discrimination. In addition, individuals in countries of higher aggregated levels of ethnic discrimination had greater odds of reporting perceived ethnic discrimination.

DISCUSSION

The present study evaluated perceived age, gender, and ethnic discrimination in 28 European countries. The study has several unique characteristics that should be noted. First, it consists of reports of perceived discrimination derived from a large cross-national representative sample

of individuals over the age of 15. The ESS was specifically designed for cross-national comparisons and all stages of the study design and administration were monitored for this particular purpose (Hader & Lynn, 2007). The focus on three of the most common types of discrimination, while employing a cross-national lens and evaluating both individual- and country-level variables associated with perceived discrimination are strengths of this study (Fiske, 2000).

Consistent with past research (Ayalon & Gum, 2011), the present study demonstrates that age is the most common attribute assigned to discrimination, followed by gender and ethnicity in almost all countries examined in the present study. This finding is particularly notable given the relative scarcity of research on the topic of ageism compared with sexism or racism (Nelson, 2005; North & Fiske, 2012). Therefore, the present study suggests that discrimination based on age should receive substantially more research attention as it affects a large portion of society.

The present study provides a clear response to past calls to further evaluate cross-national variations associated with discrimination (Fiske, 2000). A notable finding is the relatively low cross-country variability associated with perceived discrimination based on age or gender and the medium variability associated with perceived discrimination based on ethnicity. The findings demonstrate that most of the variability associated with perceived discrimination is at the individual level. The fact that the study was limited to European countries and did not include countries in other continents, such as Africa or the Far East, might partially explain this as it is possible that, overall, European countries are more similar than different. A different division of the contextual level according to religion or geographic region rather than country per se might prove informative in future studies.

The present study suggests that individual-level characteristics associated with one's interpretation of the event as discrimination are more important than actual discrimination at the country level. Nevertheless, country-level indicators of discrimination also seem to play a role. As expected, in countries that had higher levels of discrimination towards individuals based on their age or ethnicity, respondents had greater odds of reporting perceived age- and ethnic-based discrimination, respectively. However, contrary to expectations, in countries that enjoyed higher levels of gender equality, respondents were more likely to report perceived sex-based discrimination.

This discrepancy can be explained by the different country-level indicators employed in the present study. The country-level indicators of discrimination towards older adults and minorities were taken directly from the ESS and represent attitudes rather than actual discriminatory policies or acts. Given that these macro-level indicators originated from the same survey and sample as the outcome measures of perceived discrimination, and that they too represent thoughts and beliefs, rather than actual policies or behaviors, a relationship between these indicators and the outcome is expected.

On the other hand, the gender gap index is an objective indicator that represents gender (in)equality at the national level, rather than attitudes. It is possible that in countries that enjoy higher levels of gender equality, individuals are more aware of their rights and as a result, also are more likely to report perceived sex-based discrimination. This is consistent with past research, which has shown that being racially conscious or learning about feminism and gender conformity pressures are associated with higher levels of perceived ethnic and sex based discrimination among women and ethnic minorities, respectively (Gary, 1995; Leaper & Brown, 2008). It is important to note that, whereas a gender gap index is available at the cross-national level, comparable cross-national indicators of ethnic or age inequality are unavailable, suggesting

that there is potentially greater cross-national controversy around discrimination based on ethnicity and age.

As for individual-level predictors, age was a consistent predictor of perceived discrimination, with younger adults having greater odds of reporting perceived discrimination of all three types. This is somewhat contrasted with past research, which has shown that both younger and older adults tend to report high levels of ageism (Gee et al., 2007a). The present findings refute a curvilinear relationship by demonstrating that as people age, their odds of reporting perceived ageism decline. When age based discrimination was addressed in past research, it was mainly in relation to older adults, rather than younger age groups (Webb, 2004), who according to the present study, are more likely to report perceived discrimination of all three types. This calls for increased attention to younger age groups as potentially vulnerable to the experience of discrimination.

In reviewing the difference in perceived discrimination between younger and older adults, cohort or age effects should be taken into consideration. It is possible that different cohorts or age groups interpret their experiences differently or are prone to a different report style. This hypothesis is particularly plausible given past research that has shown that older, rather than younger, adults are more likely to be exposed to age or gender based discrimination (Clarke & Griffin, 2008; Kite et al., 2005; Minichiello, Browne, & Kendig, 2000). The discrepancy can be resolved by the socioemotional selectivity theory, which posits that as people age they shift their attention towards meaningful emotional goals. This, in turn, results in a better regulation of their emotions (Carstensen, Fung, & Charles, 2003). Older adults alternate the dynamic interplay within their environments in order to optimize their emotional experiences by promoting interactions that decrease exposure to negative interpersonal feelings and increase their exposure to positive ones (Charles & Carstensen, 2009). Hence, it is possible that in contrast to younger age groups, older adults simply refrain from interpreting their various experiences as discriminatory. Unfortunately, the cross-national nature of this study does not allow differentiating between age and cohort effects.

As expected, women were more likely to report gender discrimination. This finding is consistent with past research that has shown that compared with men, women are more likely to report gender discrimination (Carr et al., 2000) and to be objectively subjected to discrimination (Helps & Skitmore, 1975; Zorn et al., 2009). In addition, men were more likely to report ethnic discrimination. This again has been supported in past research that has shown that men of color are more likely to experience discrimination when compared to women (Arai et al., 2008; Williams, 2003).

Ethnic minorities were more likely to report both gender and ethnic discrimination. This finding is consistent with objective indicators, which have shown that ethnic minorities are more likely to be exposed to discrimination (Williams & Collins, 1995). Past research has shown that the attribution of various experiences to discrimination is not always negative, but can also be protective for ethnic minorities (Crocker, 1999). Hence, it is important to evaluate whether the attribution of discrimination to different ascribed characteristics (e.g., gender vs. ethnicity) produces different consequences.

As for achieved characteristics, both higher levels of education and subjective income were associated with greater odds of reporting perceived discrimination. These results are somewhat consistent with past research (Watson, Scarinci, Klesges, Slawson, & Beech, 2002). Although much research has shown that individuals of higher socioeconomic status (higher levels of

education and subjective income) are often more privileged with regard to health or education (De Vogli, Gimeno, Martini, & Conforti, 2007; Sirin, 2005), the present findings suggest that, nonetheless, they are more likely to interpret their experiences as discriminatory. This discrepancy strengthens the distinction between perceived discrimination and objective acts of discrimination.

Lower levels of life satisfaction were associated with higher odds of reporting perceived discrimination of any type. This is consistent with past research which has argued that the perception of discrimination is related to one's interpretation of the events, which is influenced by psychosocial variables (Phinney et al., 1998).

Despite its considerable strengths and contribution, the study has several shortcomings that should be noted. First, the focus on a cross-sectional design does not allow for analyses of cause and effect. This is especially true in the case of individual-level predictors, such as socioeconomic status or life satisfaction, which might be a product rather than a determinant of perceived discrimination. In addition, a distinction between different types of discrimination (e.g., life time vs. every day discrimination) might have been informative (Kessler et al., 1999). Finally, whereas the gender gap index represents an objective indicator of discrimination, the country-level age- and ethnic-based indicators represent discriminative attitudes towards older adults and ethnic minorities, respectively. The selection of country-level indicators of ageism and racism was limited by the scarcity of comparative indicators of discrimination across European countries. Nonetheless, the present study provides a unique opportunity to examine cross-country variations in perceived discrimination in Europe. The most notable finding of the present study concerns the different prevalence of the three types of discrimination, with perceived ageism having the highest prevalence and perceived racism having the lowest. This is in clear contrast to the research literature that has emphasized ethnic discrimination over gender- or age-based discrimination (Nelson, 2005; North & Fiske, 2012).

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